

## Opening Doors

IIE “Best Practices” Conference Presentation by Beverly Daniel Tatum, March 13, 2008

It is my pleasure to be here this morning, not only to share what we are doing at Spelman College but also to learn from so many of you. I look forward to what I know will be a very productive day.

I want to begin my presentation this morning by sharing a little piece of history with you. This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King and the 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Forty-four years ago the Civil Rights act of 1964 opened public accommodations to “Negroes” as we were then called. When I and my students think of daily experience at the malls of Atlanta, or in the hotels downtown, or at cultural events, or watch Barack Obama on the campaign trail, it may be hard for us to remember that it was not always the case that Black people had equal access in Atlanta and elsewhere to restaurants, and libraries, and rest rooms and water fountains. Certainly this generation of students may not know or remember that familiar names and places were sites of local protest.

Yet it was largely through the efforts of students - specifically several years of highly visible student activism – sit-ins, kneel-ins, marches, and other forms of non-violent protest that brought this change about. Those protests began in 1960 with a full page ad in the Atlanta Constitution, titled *An Appeal for Human Rights*.<sup>1</sup> Let me read for you just a little bit of that “Appeal.”

### *An Appeal for Human Rights*

*We, the students of the six affiliated institutions forming the Atlanta University Center – Clark, Morehouse, Morris Brown, and Spelman Colleges, Atlanta University, and the Interdenominational Theological Center – have joined our hearts, minds, and bodies in the cause of gaining those rights which are inherently ours as members of the human race and as citizens of the United States.*

*We pledge our unqualified support to those students in this nation who have recently been engaged in the significant movement to secure certain long-awaited rights and privileges. This protest, like the bus boycott in Montgomery, has shocked many people throughout the world. Why? Because they had not quite realized the unanimity of spirit and purpose which motivates the thinking and action of the great majority of the Negro people. The students who instigate and participate in these sit-down protests are dissatisfied, not only with the existing conditions, but with the snail-like speed with which they are being understood. Every normal human being wants to walk the earth with dignity and abhors any and all proscriptions placed upon him because of race or color. In essence, this is the meaning of the sit-down protests that are sweeping this nation today.*

*We do not intend to wait placidly for those rights which are already legally and morally ours to be meted out to us one at a time. Today’s youth will not sit by submissively, while being denied all of the rights, privileges, and joys of life. We*

*want to state clearly and unequivocally that we cannot tolerate, in a nation professing democracy and among people professing Christianity, the discriminatory conditions under which the Negro is living today in Atlanta, Georgia – supposedly one of the most progressive cities in the South.*

In the ad, they then went on to cite statistics about inequities in school funding for segregated schools. They challenged the segregation in federally funded hospitals, and in schools, challenged the absence of black police and firefighters, raised questions about inequities in school funding (inequities which still persist), protested the fact that even in 1960 many of them were still being denied the right to vote. It was a very powerful and courageous statement, this full page ad in the Atlanta newspaper.

It is a common misconception that Martin Luther King, Jr. led this activity in Atlanta, but in fact the students initiated it. Dr. King himself wrote, “A generation of young people has come out of decades of shadows to face naked state power; it has lost its fears, and experienced the majestic dignity of a direct struggle with their own history – the slave revolts, the incomplete revolution of the Civil War, the brotherhood of colonial colored men in Africa and Asia. They are an integral part of the history which is reshaping the world, replacing a dying order with a modern democracy.”

We might ask: *How did that generation lose its fear?* One answer could be: **They studied abroad.** Spelman students like Marian Wright (now known as Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund) and Roslyn Pope – one of the authors of that powerful ad - left the segregated South behind in their junior year and experienced their first taste of real freedom in France.

Just a few weeks ago Roslyn Pope was back at Spelman, and she talked about how her commitment to fight against segregation in the United States was indeed fueled by the freedom she experienced in Paris – able to live with the dignity and humanity that was her civil right. Empowered by that experience of freedom, she returned to the States ready to stand up for change – and she joined with her friends in the Atlanta University Center and authored the statement in the Atlanta Constitution.

Roslyn’s comments were echoed in that conversation by Marian Wright Edelman and others of their generation who also experienced the transformational impact of a study abroad experience. These women were ahead of their time – among a very small minority of African American students who ventured abroad during that era – their travel made possible by a scholarship provided at Spelman College by Charles Merrill. But their experience – and the impact of their post-travel activism – underscores why international travel is so critical. It is critical not only because we need to better understand other cultures, or not only because we need to prepare for the global marketplace, or not only because we need to be goodwill ambassadors for the United States – all worthy goals, to be sure – but also international travel is important because it allows us to step back and look at our own society - *and through that reflection and observation – it allows us to make it better.*

So how do we get them there? We know that despite the steadily increasing numbers of students studying abroad, just a little more than 200,000 - less than 1% of all college students – choose to study abroad. Of those most are women (66%). Just a small fraction are students of color – 6% Hispanics, 4% African Americans, Multiracial students (1%) and Native American students (less than 1%) – percentages which have changed very little in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> What can we do about it?

At Spelman we are trying to do something about it. We want every Spelman student to have an international experience as part of her Spelman education, and we are making progress. The number of students studying abroad has doubled over the last six years – from approximately 40 students to 75-80 a year. We already have more than 50 applicants just for the fall semester next year – approximately 10% of the junior class. It's not where we want to be yet, but we are heartened by our progress.

Where are they going? Everywhere – 9 to Ghana, 9 in South Africa, 2 to Japan, and also in China. Argentina is very popular, and we have some in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Australia, France, Italy, Germany, the UK, and quite a few in Spain. We recognize 3 key barriers which we are trying to overcome

### **1) The first is finances.**

Most of our students are eligible for financial aid yet at Spelman the average aid package only meets 25% of the demonstrated need. Students are dependent not only on Pell grants, and federal and unsubsidized loans, but they also need the earnings of part-time employment throughout the school year to help them meet their expenses. In this context, it is particularly difficult to study abroad if it means giving up your employment. Finding replacement funds is critical.

At Spelman we have tried to address this financial need in two very concrete ways: First, we allow all of our student aid to travel. If the student is attending an approved program, she will be able to apply her Spelman financial aid toward the cost of that program. It is important to understand here that the cost of attending Spelman is considerably lower than many other equally selective private institutions. Recognizing the economic disadvantage of our target student population, our total cost of attendance in 2007-08 is slightly less than \$30,000 as compared to the \$45,000 price tag of other private colleges. This means that there is often a gap between what the student would pay at Spelman and the cost of the study abroad program – a gap that must be filled and we work with students to help fill it. We begin by negotiating the best deal we can with the host provider. Then we provide “home school” scholarships to help fill the gap. Our funds are limited – about \$75,000 this year – but we were able to make the difference between going and not going for 21 students this year with those funds. And sometimes the host institution provides scholarships.

The second thing we do, related to the first, is to require all students who are Pell-grant eligible to apply for external funding before awarding any of our limited institutional study abroad funds. So students have a strong incentive to apply for the Benjamin Gilman Scholarship, for example. If they are headed to study in Asia, they would be

expected to apply for the Freeman-ASIA Scholarship. With the energetic support of our study abroad director, Dr. Margery Ganz (who is here in the audience) and the faculty members who assist her, this requirement has led to a high success rate for our students, and has allowed us to stretch our study abroad dollars even further.

In those cases where the student is not successful in her efforts to obtain a Gilman or other scholarship, Dr. Ganz works closely with the Financial Aid and Scholarship Offices on campus to help the student find other sources of funding. *But money is not the only barrier.*

## **2) Parental fears and lack of experience combine to form another impediment.**

Of course, fear of unfamiliar territory is something that many students and their parents might experience. For students of color and their parents, such anxiety may be exacerbated by concerns about social acceptance – will I be a victim of xenophobic or explicitly racist attitudes? Parents worry, “how will I support her if she is so far away?” Ironically, as was illustrated in my opening remarks, students might find more freedom of movement and hospitality than they have at home.

In a May 2005 *IENetworker* article entitled, “Study Abroad for Students of Color,” the author Marilyn Jackson made the point that popular images of students traveling abroad in movies and elsewhere are almost exclusively images of young white students. The combination of few real-life examples and even fewer virtual examples may create a sense that study abroad is something that “only rich and/or white people do”

How do we interrupt that kind of thinking? By providing examples – many examples – inviting alumnae, young and old, to share their experiences in assemblies specifically targeted to first-year and sophomore students. Recently a 30-something alumna was on campus talking about the power of her experience in Senegal during her junior year and how it is still shaping her life.

We also have to be willing to name the fears – concerns about racism for example – and to talk to parents about them. We want to create the expectation that this is what Spelman students will do during their college years, and we introduce the topic beginning when they are applying to Spelman. We talk to parents about study abroad when they come to visit the campus, during orientation, and host a panel of returning students to discuss their experiences during Family Weekend. This year we had students complete passport applications as part of their new student orientation. But it is not just parents who discourage the students. It can be faculty as well.

## **3) Overcoming Faculty resistance**

We know that students in social sciences and humanities are more likely to study abroad than those in the sciences. Sequencing of requirements, and reluctance to accept credits from other institutions, often serve as impediments. Here we use two strategies – one is the individualized one of coaching students on how to advocate for themselves – being able to articulate what it is that they want to do and why they want to do it, supporting them in a process of negotiation within their major department.

Another more institutionalized approach is to really establish the goal of international experience for each student as an institutional priority (through the process of strategic planning) and then engaging department chairs in the implementation of our efforts. For example, there are 17 faculty members on the selection committee for the study abroad scholarships that we award, representing all the broad disciplinary divisions on the campus. Their own commitment to helping students achieve the study abroad goal is deepened by this process.

We also are sending faculty abroad – to participate in summer study programs, in particular. Transformed by their own travel experiences, they are more likely to encourage and support students in their efforts. Of course, study abroad is not the only way to internationalize the campus.

We would love to have more international students joining us – but don't yet have the financial resources to support them. We have found cost-effective benefit in providing short-term travel experiences which help whet the student and faculty appetite for more. One such example is the use of spring break for international service trips. As we speak, we have a group of students in the Dominican Republic – and another group in Senegal.

Our relationship with an organization called 10,000 Girls in Senegal was initiated by a student who was studying abroad in Senegal in 2006. She met the founder of 10,000 Girls, Dr. Viola Vaughn, and invited her to come to Spelman to speak. The students were inspired to assist 10,000 Girls by raising money and donating books. When they learned that the school had no place to store the books, the idea of building a library emerged and the students raised money to purchase the supplies. This spring nineteen students will participate in the humanitarian trip to Senegal. While in Senegal, students will spend time in Dakar, Kaolack and a rural village. They will visit the American Embassy, meet with project manager for USAID Senegal Project, and visit with Spelman College alumna and former faculty member, Dr. Siga Jagne. Students will spend time in a rural village and support the construction of a new library for which they have raised funds.

Summer Language institutes in Japan and Martinique, and summer studio classes in an artist colony in Panama, organized by one of our faculty members who is himself Panamanian are just a few other examples. Our Model UN team has traveled to Egypt, China, Geneva, Switzerland, and this year Mexico as part of the Model UN competitions, and our robotics team, known as the SpelBots, have competed in the International RoboCup in Japan, Germany, and this summer will be in China. Each of these experiences adds to the campus expectation that engagement with the world is expected at Spelman.

The latest example is a low cost one – but very exciting. Just a few weeks ago, our Environmental Studies students were invited to participate in a video conference organized by Dubai Women's College. When the invitation came in an e-mail to me, I forwarded it to faculty members to see if they would be interested and to be sure we had the IT support to make it happen. The answer on both counts was "yes" and then we

learned that 11:00 a.m. (the time of the conference in Dubai) was 1:00 a.m. in Atlanta. Undaunted by the time difference, the students, faculty and IT staff were ready and had the chance to exchange ideas with participants from Dubai, Poland, and Italy, just to name a few. They were all so excited!

Of course we could do more if we had more money – but to me the most important part is creating that institutional expectation – and as the institutional leader, there are many things I can do to create that expectation – not the least of which is providing my own example.

Parker Palmer is one of my favorite writers on the subject of education, and he says this about leadership.

“Leadership is a concept we often resist. It seems immodest, even self-aggrandizing, to think of ourselves as leaders. But if it is true that we are made for community, then leadership is everyone’s vocation, and it can be an evasion to insist that it is not. When we live in the close-knit ecosystem called community, everyone follows and everyone leads. Even I..[he writes] have come to understand that for better or for worse, I lead by word and deed *simply because I am here doing what I do*. If you are also here, doing what you do, then you also exercise leadership of some sort.<sup>3</sup>

Students pay attention to what we do. When I travel abroad – which I do at least once every year – I talk to students about my trips in my speeches, hoping to plant a few seeds. My most recent trip was in August to Bellagio Italy to attend a gathering of women’s college presidents from around the world – colleges in Bangladesh, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Japan, India, Pakistan, Bahrain, the Philippines, Australia, *and* the United States were represented. We gathered to talk about the unfinished and important agenda of educating women for leadership. I wove remarks about the conference in my speech at the opening of school, and as I concluded, this is what I said:

A choice to change the world means engaging with the world beyond our gates. Community service has always been part of the Spelman mission and vision – but how we define community is broadening. We are part of a global village, and we need to know our neighbors. I am *excited* about the steadily increasing opportunities for our students to engage with the world. Whether through traditional methods like study abroad or shorter term experiences like an alternative spring break service trip to Senegal (as some students did last year) or participating in a model UN competition in Egypt, China, or Switzerland (as some of our students have done), or going to a leadership conference in Dubai (which I hope some of our students will do this year) or interacting with international visitors who come here to Atlanta, a Spelman education should be a global education. You can’t *change* the world without information *about* the world and in this case, there is no substitute for experience. Get your passports ready! Women of Spelman are going places. And the world is coming here! This new worldwide network of women’s colleges born at Bellagio offers great

opportunities for exchange for our students and our faculty as well, and I look forward to telling you more about those opportunities as they unfold.

One student was listening carefully. She approached me at the end of my speech, a young sophomore from Miami. She asked if she could be one of the students to go to Dubai. Pell-eligible, her expected family contribution is zero. She said, “I don’t have a passport yet, but I’ll get one.” It took her all semester to save the money to get her passport, but when she came back to school in January, she did indeed have one.

She leaves for Dubai next week. What will *she* be inspired to change when she returns? Ladies and gentleman, we must open those doors – so they can open ours.

Thank you very much.

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the Appeal may be found in the Appendix of *Undaunted by the Fight: Spelman Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1957-1967* by Harry Lefever (Mercer University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> IIE Networker, May 2007, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Palmer, Parker. *Let Your Life Speak*. (Jossey-Bass, 2000), p.74